

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

FEB 1 1952 25X1A

ONI Contribution to NIE-35/1:

Probable Developments in Indochina through Mid-1952

I.A. - On land the current military situation in Indochina is characterized by a stalemate with heavy fighting in Tonkin between the Franco-Vietnamese forces and the Viet Minh and by incessant guerrilla-type warfare elsewhere in Indochina. On the sea and in the air the French have undisputed control because the Viet Minh do not possess a navy or an air force. Such a condition is likely to prevail unless the Chinese Communists actively intervene to insure a Viet Minh victory.

1. French naval personnel in Indochina consist of 715 officers (including 1 Vietnamese) and 10,541 enlisted men (including 435 Vietnamese), making a total of 11,256.

ONI DECLASSIFICATION/RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS ON FILE

French naval forces in Indochina include:

CVL	1	AO-IO	3
DD	1	AVP	2
PG	2	AGSC	1
PCE	9*	AT-YT	20
AMS	6	LST	4
PC	11	LSIL	15
SG	8	LSSL	7
YP	22**	LSU	15
AR-ARL	2	Miscellaneous small	
AP	1	landing craft	225 (approx.)

* Formerly rated as AM (Fleet Minesweepers)

** Includes 6 Motor Fishing Vessels

French naval forces have been relatively effective while conducting amphibious raids and giving support to army elements up the various rivers of Indochina. The limited coastal patrols performed have been fairly successful in eliminating the smuggling of contraband material. The naval forces have a very limited capability to combat mines, aircraft, submarines. All vessels

Review of this document by CIA has determined that

☒ CIA has no objection to declass
☐ It contains information of CIA
interest that would remain
classified at TS, CS, C
Authority: 100-102
Contains nothing of CIA interest

Date 2-10-82

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

-1-

JAN 30 1952

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

are manned by fewer personnel than considered necessary for wartime by US standards.

As regards tactical disposition, the larger combatant units, CVL, DD, PG, PCE and occasional PC, are utilized in coastal patrol. The smaller combatant units and amphibious craft are used almost exclusively for river amphibious operation. Approximately 85 per cent of all vessels are active, crews rotating from vessel to vessel when repairs are necessary.

Neither the Vietnamese nor the Viet Minh possess naval forces.

1a. Military operations in Tonkin during the past six months have evidenced increased capabilities of the French naval force operating in the area. The CVL ARROMANCHES has provided additional air support for ground troops and increased the effectiveness of maritime surveillance. Landing craft furnished under MDAP have permitted the French to carry out more amphibious operations. Patrol craft, also provided under MDAP, have replaced obsolescent French vessels in coastal blockade and surveillance duties. Moreover, there has been an improvement in naval personnel efficiency through actual experience both in combat and handling of amphibious and other craft in dangerous inland and coastal waterways.

One important limiting factor has been the lack of naval personnel. Generally, the increase in the acquisition of vessels and equipment has been greater than the increase in personnel available to handle them.

1b. Lacking a navy, the Viet Minh have been much constrained by French naval action. The overwater supply routes from Hainan to Annam, used to receive aid from Communist China, have been abandoned for routes in the coastal waters of southern Kwangtung or overland roads in south China. There have been reports that the Viet Minh, seeking to overcome this water hazard, are employing

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

fast PT-type boats, possibly supplied by the Chinese Communists, to ferry supplies from Hainan. They are not believed to have been very successful because of close French maritime surveillance in the area.

1c 1. The French have continued to train the Vietnamese on LCVF-type craft for amphibious operations. Reports indicate that the Vietnamese are responding favorably to the training and are capable of participating in commando raids. To date, however, these training activities have not materially improved over-all French-Vietnamese capabilities. Although the French have announced plans for the creation of a naval training school to be located at Nha Trang, no steps have been taken to recruit personnel or acquire the necessary facilities.

1i. US assistance has been one of the chief factors in the continued improvement of the combat effectiveness of the French-Vietnamese forces. The French Navy in Indochina, however, has received more vessels than it has personnel available to man them.

1d. Although there is no evidence of the existence of a Viet Minh Navy, there have been reports of Chinese Communist naval aid, largely in the form of training Viet Minh personnel in China in the operation of small craft and possibly submarines. There is no evidence that the Chinese Communists have supplied the Viet Minh with mines or small naval craft (except possibly the PT-type boats mentioned under 1b. above). Naval aid to date has been only of secondary importance in the Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh.

1.B. 1 & 2. Because of their preoccupation with organizing and training their own navy, it is unlikely the Chinese Communists would be able to provide material and technical assistance for organizing a significant Viet Minh naval force,

regardless of the situation in Korea. However, the Chinese Communists can maintain and increase the assistance in naval training and possibly provide some manpower and materiel.

SECURITY INFORMATION

I.C. - 1c & 2c. Since the Chinese Communists have committed no naval combatant or logistic forces to the Korean campaign, a Korean armistice would have no direct effect on their ability to commit naval forces to an invasion of Indochina. The Chinese Communist Navy has available for operations against Indochina about 132 vessels including one light cruiser (present status unknown), nine frigates, about 70 minor patrol craft of various types, 44 landing craft, and six auxiliary vessels. In addition, operations could be aided by a large number of motor junks and other native craft which are armed with anti-tank guns and other unorthodox weapons and, in some cases, lightly armored. For over-water lift purposes, as well as for laying mines, thousands of sea-going junks and other native craft which could be commandeered on short notice.

The Soviets have moreover, been training Chinese Communist submarine crews at Dairen for over a year. Though there is no evidence that any submarines are yet fully operated by Chinese, it is possible that the Chinese may assume full operational control of submarines at any time.

It is highly unlikely, however, that the Chinese Communists would commit a significant portion of this very limited naval potential in aid of the Viet Minh, in view of the risks involved and of the lack of need for a naval effort. In any event, the capabilities of the Chinese Communist Navy for operations in Indochina waters would be limited to:

- a. Sneak attacks by a few PT boats and possibly by a very few submarines.
- b. Augmentation of the Viet Minh mining effort, using Soviet manufactured moored, ground, and floating mines laid from miscellaneous small craft, and

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

the China mainland to the northern coast of Indochina.

With regard to g it is extremely doubtful that the Chinese Communists would wish to accept the risk of large-scale amphibious operations so long as there existed an effective French sea and air opposition, not only to the initial amphibious lift but also to the subsequent sea-borne logistic support which would be required. Of greater probability would be infiltration landing of battalion strength on the islands and coast adjacent to the Chinese border. However, if any amphibious lift were undertaken in support of a land invasion, the Chinese Communist would be able to muster sufficient vessels for whatever amphibious support were deemed necessary. Vessels currently available to the Chinese Communists for such an operation (including the landing craft mentioned above as well as commercial craft) are:

<u>TYPES</u>	<u>GRT. EACH</u>	<u>TOTAL GRT.</u>
12 LST	1,700 GRT	20,400 GRT
15 LSM	400 GRT	6,000 GRT
15 LSI	125 GRT	1,875 GRT
2 LSU	100 GRT	200 GRT
10,000 Small Craft Sail & Motor Junks, etc		1,000,000 Tons
72 Freighters & Combinations		175,424 GRT
50-60 Vessels owned by Chinese Communists but under foreign registry		200,000 GRT

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

I.D. 1. If Chinese technical and materiel assistance were maintained at approximately the present nature and levels, Viet Minh naval capabilities would not be appreciably affected.

2. Regardless of the situation in Korea, if the Chinese Communists were to increase their materiel assistance to the Viet Minh to include mines, the Viet Minh capability of forcing the French naval forces to abandon the Tonkin area would be increased.

3. If the Chinese Communists were to commit naval and air forces for an all-out invasion of Indochina, the French would probably be forced to abandon Tonkin and retire to southern Indochina.

I.E. 1 & 2. Since Viet Minh lacks a navy, the French would have undisputed control of the coastal waters, regardless of the volume of the present type of Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh. Currently, the French naval forces in Indochina are fully capable of providing adequate support for ground activities along the various rivers. They are also capable of conducting a fairly effective anti-smuggling coastal patrol. With an increase in present Chinese Communist assistance, however, attrition of French landing craft and small units from mine warfare may be expected to increase.

3. If the Chinese Communists were to commit naval and air forces to assist the Viet Minh and to employ mines, French naval forces would be seriously threatened. Should the French be forced to abandon the Tonkin Delta, their naval activities would be largely confined to harassing and interdiction of enemy supply lines. French naval forces in Indochina are especially limited in their capabilities of combatting submarines, aircraft and mines.

~~SECRET~~
SECURITY INFORMATION

I.F. 1. The French-Vietnamese forces are faced with a manpower problem. The French have sustained heavy casualties in the fighting in Indochina and are anxious to create a native force capable of defending their own country. Training and recruitment of Vietnamese to operate small amphibious craft can be expected to continue, thereby releasing French personnel for larger vessels.

The French Navy has sufficient manpower reserves to meet its present force. There are now 62,600 officers and men on duty, including the air arm of 10,000; naval reserves amount to 8,000 officers and 150,000 men.

The materiel situation of the entire French Navy has been improving. Bases and naval facilities have been reconstructed and repaired since the war, and new facilities are being built in North Africa. New vessels and equipment are slowly being produced. With continued MDAP aid the Navy should be able to improve its materiel position if governmental appropriations are made to utilize the production capacity available. MDAP materiel which is being supplied in increasing quantities direct to Indochina should improve the capabilities of the French-Vietnamese naval forces. Provided Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh is not increased, the French Navy should be able to maintain undisputed control over Indochina waters.

I.G. 1. If for no other reason than its geographic position, Indochina is the key to the control of Southeast Asia. The control of Indochina by the USSR and/or Communist China would provide an advance base for pushing international Communism throughout Southeast Asia, an area with important natural resources and situated astride the air and sea routes between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The harbors of Saigon and Haiphong and the anchorage at Cam Ranh afford good bases for naval forces operating in the area. Were Indochina incorporated

~~SECRET~~
SECURITY INFORMATION

into the sphere of Communist influence, the nearest good operating bases available to US or UN forces would be Australia, the Philippines, and Singapore. The loss of Southeast Asia to the Communists would also affect the economic life of Japan. Deprived of commercial outlets on the Asiatic mainland, Japan would be forced to depend chiefly on the US and the West to absorb her industrial output or to come to some terms of agreement with the USSR and/or Communist China. Finally, a surplus rice-producing area would be available to feed China.

I.G. - 2 The naval bases in Indochina would be of little value and unnecessary for the defense of China.

~~SECRET~~

SECURITY INFORMATION

SECURITY INFORMATION

I.H. With regard to Communist Chinese courses of action in Indochina, a significant pattern may be discerned. This pattern of Communist Chinese aid to the Viet Minh, consisting of a cumulative and undoubtedly planned program of assistance, suggests that the Chinese have adopted the strategy of gradually conditioning the West to such intervention. Viewed over a long period of time, this gradual military penetration might well, in the end, be tantamount of large-scale invasion of Indochina, such as occurred in Korea.

It is possible that fear of US/UN retaliation in the form of an air campaign and/or a naval blockade against the entire Chinese mainland is a deterring factor in a Communist Chinese decision to invade Indochina. However, as long as the Allied commitment in Korea remains, it is probable that the Communist Chinese would write off the possibility of substantial US/UN retaliation. On the other hand, it is believed that increase in Communist Chinese aid to the Viet Minh, possibly including Chinese manpower in Viet Minh units, would not be affected by fear of such retaliation.

The requirements of internal consolidation in China are not believed to offer any obstacle to the Chinese Communists' commitment of 30,000 - 50,000 troops in Indochina and/or continuation of military supplies to the Viet Minh. It is believed, however, that the internal security situation in China might prevent the Chinese Communists from deploying a large force, such as 150,000 to 250,000 troops, in Indochina.

It is believed, however, that significant improvement of the French-Vietnamese military and political position in Indochina would probably spur Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh and might lead to participation by Chinese regulars.

SECRET

SECURITY INFORMATION

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

Should the French will to resist weaken because of economic and military strains on metropolitan France, it appears certain that the Chinese Communists would capitalize on the situation, either by insisting on truce talks, or by attempting to install at the minimum a regime with Communist participation in Indochina. Should neighboring Southeast Asian countries fall under Communist control, it is probable that French-Vietnamese resistance would collapse.

SECRET
SECURITY INFORMATION

-10-

~~SECRET~~

SECURITY INFORMATION

troop movements

II.A. - Increased Chinese Communist stockpiling and troop movements near the Indochina border would seem to indicate the possibility of direct intervention by Chinese Communist forces on the behalf of the Viet Minh. This capability has existed for some time and at present appears to be somewhat heightened. The recent completion of a rail line from Nanning to the Indochina border at Chen-nan-kuan and improvement in the road system between these two cities point to the continuation and more likely to an increase in material aid to the Viet Minh.

Evidence that the Viet Minh forces are already receiving a greater flow of supplies was furnished during their recent attacks against French-held perimeter in Northern Tonkin. In these attacks, the Viet Minh showed much greater coordination in their attacks (evidence of improved radio communications) and a readiness which they had not previously demonstrated to expend munitions freely.

In addition to increased logistic supply to the Viet Minh forces, some reports within recent months have suggested the possibility that the Chinese Communists were strengthening their regular troops in the border area preparatory to an invasion of Indochina.

However, so long as the struggle does not turn against the Viet Minh, it is likely that the Chinese will restrict themselves to supplying advisory personnel only. Nevertheless, the possibility exists that the Chinese may gradually increase the number of "volunteers" now serving with Viet Minh troops and that combat troops as well as advisers and technicians may eventually be thus utilized.

~~SECRET~~

SECURITY INFORMATION